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ABSTRACT

A study of Jordanian English-as-a-Second-Language learners examined their metalinguistic knowledge of 15 English grammatical concepts or categories via rule description and exemplification, and also explored the link between metalinguistic knowledge and proficiency in using those categories or their exponents in both formally and situationally-oriented contexts. Subjects were 233 grade 10 students. The 15 categories were presented to the students in four tasks: one eliciting metalinguistic knowledge; one eliciting descriptive metalinguistic knowledge; and two demanding formal and communicative use, respectively. The responses were sorted according to whether the first or second task was accomplished better, and analyzed for patterns in the third and fourth tasks. Results indicate a considerable awareness of both exemplary and descriptive metalinguistic knowledge, with somewhat more exemplary knowledge. The "exemplary knowledge" group was significantly more successful at using the categories both formally and situationally than the descriptive group. However, both were more successful at formal than communicative use of the categories. It is suggested that metalinguistic knowledge enhances language learning. Implications for classroom instruction are offered. Contains 30 references. (MSE)

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METALINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE AND FORMAL-FUNCTIONAL PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH: THE CASE OF BASIC EDUCATION STAGE LEARNERS IN JORDAN*

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ABSTRACT : The present study aimed at assessing Jordanian 10th graders' metalinguistic knowledge of 15 English grammatical concepts or categories via rule description and exemplification as well as the link between the achieved metalinguistic knowledge and the students' proficiency in using the same categories or their exponents in formally and situationally - oriented contexts.

The study also attempted to assess, though peripherally, the accessibility of the 15 categories to the target learners' linguistic use in formal and situational, communicative contexts. The 15 categories were presented to 233 students in four corresponding tasks. Task 1 elicited descriptive metalinguistic knowledge, and task 2 elicited exemplary metalinguistic knowledge, while tasks 3 and 4 demanded formal use and communicative use of the 15 categories, respectively. The papers were then sorted into two groups according to the students' total grade on Tasks 1 and 2. The papers which scored higher on Task 1 represented the descriptive metalinguistic group, and those which scored higher on Task 2, the exemplary metalinguistic group. the results of these two groups were compared along with both the other two tasks.

A prototypical application of tasks 1 and 2 revealed the neutrality of gender with regard to metalinguistic knowledge acquisition of either type.

It was found that Jordanian 10th grades are aware of a considerable amount of metalinguistic knowledge of both types, with exemplary knowledge being more substantial than descriptive knowledge. It was also found that the exemplary group was significantly more successful at using the categories both formally and situationally than the descriptive group. Both groups, however, were more successful at the formal use than the communicative use of the categories.

Moreover, although metalinguistic knowledge in its own right cannot lead to acquisition in the absence of using comprehensible input in communicative activities, the results of the study manifested significant positive correlations, which suggests a facilitative role for metalinguistic knowledge in the enhancement of language learning.

Finally, the variable acquisitional levels of the target categories in the given formal and situational contexts imply their disparate accessibility to learners. The discrepancies in acquisition were ascribed to the type and quality of instruction as well as the amount of exposure to and complexity of the respective category.

The study concluded with some instruction-related recommendations.

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Introduction:

The problem:

Experience informs us that despite recent trends, EFL metalinguistic instruction is still prevalent in Jordanian schools. While the curriculum for the Basic Education Stage (BES) is virtually learner-centered, with a notional-functional orientation (c.f., the BES English Language Curriculum, p.1), neither the curricular stipulations nor the teachers' practices have totally abandoned focus on language forms. The curriculum (p.65) commends the usefulness of an explicit but simple grammatical explanation so that "if there is a clear, simple rule which (the teacher) is quite sure of, it may help to clarify matters for at least some pupils". Acting upon this advice and due to their initial structural training, many EFL teachers have taken a liberty and indulged in detailed grammatical explanations. Their formal treatments, however, range from consciousness - raising (Sharwood- Smitth, 1980), that is, drawing the learners' attention to the new forms, to a brief, simple explanation, often using imprecise and inadequate metalinguistic descriptions.(1) Some teachers, to be sure, draw heavily on giving ample examples of the target form in the belief that this inductive presentation will lead to FL learning.

The effectiveness of explicit language instruction has long been an unresolved polemy. To some researchers, it has been conceived of as futile, rather detrimental to the development of FL competence. The proponents of the natural approach, (Krashen and Terrell, 1983) and the affiliated communicative language teaching movement have de-emphasized formal instruction on the grounds that FL learning develops unconsciously in the same manner a child learns his mother tongue. According to this view, language acquisition occurs only through comprehensible input, i.e., through meaningful communication and without formal instruction.

The counter argument, however, takes on from the frequently observed corollary of this communicative trend, namely, that FL learners more often than not find themselves uncertain or, rather, unaware of the grammaticality or acceptability of their linguistic performance. Accordingly, FL teachers perceive it as mandatory to offer formal instruction since from their perspective, it will help establish solid grounds for their pedagogical practices and will meet the students' learning strategies. It is, therefore, imperative within this debatable issue to investigate the relationship between the learners' metalinguistic knowledge and their parochial language use in the

Jordanian context, particularly, the correlation between their ability to identify explanatory and exemplary representations of grammatical categories as well as their ability to use those categories effectively in identifiable linguistic and situational contexts, an endeavor that will be pursued in the present study.

Review of Related Literature:

The role of metalinguistic knowledge in the enhancement of FL competence is debatable in the literature. Let me explain from the outset what is intended by this expression and then proceed to briefly explicate its controversial role in FL instruction.

Metalinguistic or explicit knowledge refers to what the learner knows **about** language, not **how** to use it. Yet, his knowledge may oscillate between simple awareness of a linguistic form and the articulation of the rule for that form. More precisely, it may encompass all the conscious facts the learner knows about the target form (cf. Bialystock, 1980). This conception holds in contrast with implicit knowledge which constitutes the intuitive, rather unconscious cognitive source underlying the learner's communication. The most salient contrast between the two modes of knowledge rests in their ultimate goals. As Van Patten (1984-reiterated in Odlin, 1986: 138) points out, the target of explicit knowledge is language per se whereas the target of implicit knowledge is the world at large, i.e., language use. It is concisely this explicit- implicit debate that we will pursue in the following review.

Several researchers have assigned a diminishing role to metalinguistic knowledge and explicit (formal) instruction. Reber (1976) maintains that language acquisition takes place in the complete absence of abstract, metalinguistic knowledge: learners use their intuitive, rather unconsciously learned knowledge of grammatical rules to judge the grammaticality of new linguistic input. He found that learners who engaged in an explicit search of rules which describe complex structures performed more poorly in memorizing exemplars of the target structure than those who operated in a more neutral, implicit fashion (pp.92-4). Thus, Reber ascertains that implicit learning is superior to metalinguistic learning, and that learners do not behave in the learning process like ordinary learners, but like "linguists" (p.94). Nevertheless, Reber notes in the same piece of research that conscious rule-learning is helpful, particularly when the task is simple. This remark is commensurate with other researchers' observations (e.g. Dulay, et al., 1987:65; Mclaughlin, 1990; 621 f; Krashen, 1981, 1982).

In the same line of pursuit of the issue, Krashen (1981), distinguishing acquisition from learning, conceives of the former as an

unconscious process analogous to L1 learning and the latter as a conscious process functioning primarily as a monitor of the former. To be sure, Krashen realizes that no Fl learning occurs in the complete absence of consciousness. He notes that formal classroom instruction often manifests some sort of metalinguistic knowledge-at least to control the learners' deviant performance. However, while observing the learners' metalinguistic awareness, he interprets it both psychologically and developmentally (c.f Odlin, 1986:35). In other words, Krashen ascribes the variability of metalinguistic awareness among children, adolescents, and adults to their cognitive development and increased affective filter and concludes that formal knowledge has little bearing, if any, on developing the learner's communicative competence even when used coterminously with practice. From this perspective, the function of formal knowledge is to monitor the learner's accuracy, but not to initiate automaticity.

Krashen and his associates (cf. Krashen and Terrell, 1983) maintain that knowledge of rules does not guarantee their implementation. They contend that language acquisition is triggered only by "meaningful input" which is (a) slightly challenging (b) psychologically appealing, and (c) interesting and conducive to self-learning. For Krashen, metalinguistic knowledge is not only unproductive, but detrimental to communication, a case which he designates as metalinguistic incompetence (Krashen, 1982:94). Nevertheless, as Odlin (1986) notes, it is likely that Krashen is referring here to the learning of vigorous and complex rule formulations. Besides, while Krashen's full theory discredits the role of conscious learning, it perhaps hints at "a hypothesis that conscious learning through analysis, practice, and explanation is beneficial in certain ways" (cf. Palmer, 1992:142).

In a similar tendency Bialystock (1979, 1980, 1981) attributes Fl acquisition to implicit knowledge, too. However, she acknowledges three instrumental functions for metalinguistic knowledge, viz (a) to bring implicit knowledge to awareness, (b) to store information which is likely to convert to implicit knowledge, and (c) to store information of further monitor consultation(2). Bialystock (1981) views metalinguistic knowledge here simply as rule awareness or any level of rule conceptualization, not necessarily a well-formulated rule (pp.34-5). For instance, she maintains that it is sufficient for children to realize that a certain verb takes an object while another one does not without knowing the grammatical concept of transitivity. At the level of instruction, however, Bialystock distinguishes three types of task: structural, rhetorical, and instrumental. She recommends the use of metalanguage in instrumental tasks. Interestingly in this regard, she suggests that metalinguistic knowledge may promote communicative

proficiency, particularly when used concomitantly with practice in communicative activities (ibid). In this respect, metalinguistic knowledge plays a variable role. For example, Bialystock found that a conversational task may require less metalinguistic knowledge than a grammatical exercise, say on the comparative/superlative forms. Likewise, a planned interview may demand more use of metalanguage than a casual football match conversation. This variable role of metalinguistic knowledge is acknowledged by Krashen (1981) who admits, as hinted above, that different developmental groups use the monitor variably in their communication.

On the other hand, research findings regarding the facilitative impact of metalinguistic knowledge on FL learning is far from being conclusive. Contrary to the previous views, many studies (e.g. Clark, 1978; McLaughlin, 1990; Odlin, 1986; Schwartz, 1993; Sharwood-Smith, 1993-to mention but a few) have highlighted the centrality of metalinguistic knowledge in FL instruction. Clark (1978) observes some aspects of metalinguistic manifestations even in the interactions of children including, inter alia, self-correction, language choice, inquiry about the correct utterance, remarks about the utterances of others, analysis of words and sentences, grammatical judgment on utterances, and style shifting. He maintains that such manifestations suggest the manipulation of some sort of metalinguistic knowledge along with the communicative skill.

Swain (1985) considers formal instruction central for FL acquisition conditional that it is mediated by interactive negotiation with the learners (p.248). She maintains that while formal instruction is time-saving with respect to hypothesizing and testing, it is insufficient by itself for successful FL learning and must be therefore accompanied with communicative practice.

Similarly, Rutherford (1987) endorses 'consciousness-raising' provided that structures are presented in clear contexts (p.170). Noting that FL learners often engage in processes of analysis, hypothesis formation and testing, generalization, etc., he argues for the effectiveness of simple grammar learning, particularly in situations where the learner embarks on working out the analysis by himself (p.159). Thus, Rutherford conceives of simplified metalinguistic accounts as vital for FL teaching and learning, especially if they are directly imparted to the learner (p.24). Yet, he calls for the use of metalinguistic accounts only as an aid or a facilitator to learning rather than as an object of study in their own right. Similarly, Schmidt (1988) contends that nothing in language learning becomes intake other than what learners consciously notice. Likewise, Huebner (1991:158) attests that "conscious conceptualization of metalinguistic activities on the part of the

learner is always present in one form or another in acquisition". Mclaughlin (1990:624) also ascertains the centrality of explicit instruction. To support his view, he draws on the connectionist view (McClelland, et al., 1986), namely, that language learning consists of a network of connections organized in the learner's mind which enable him to produce rule-like behaviour, but the rules themselves exist as associative strengths distributed across the entire network, a view excluding the notion of unconscious learning.

In the same line of argument, Odlin (1986) characterizes metalinguistic knowledge as (a) simple and imperfect, (b) accessible for monitoring and discourse organization, and (c) accessible for both linguistic form and function. The third characteristic (c) is of particular relevance to the present study. It implies that accessibility of form and function is indivisible (ibid:131). Thus, contrary to Krashen's views, Odlin holds that metalinguistic knowledge has a communicative dimension. Nevertheless, Odlin is aware that the acquisition of form and function entails a different level of input exposure. Stated otherwise, Odlin points out that whereas the learning of forms is based on linguistic explanation, the learning of functions should be based on receptive and interactive activities. He also notes that successful learners exhibit optimal metalinguistic awareness as they monitor the key linguistic forms in their communication in the FL and as they attempt to correct their errors (ibid).

Furthermore, Odlin ascertains that metalinguistic acquisition is facilitated by exemplification. This finding which is of direct relevance to the present study endorses Dulany et al's (1984- noted by McLaughlin, 1990) which states that FL learners acquire substantive grammatical knowledge through tracing the examples in the input, a fact which empowers them to make grammatical judgments. Odlin contends that this facilitative effect of exemplary metalinguistic knowledge is explicable in terms of the notion of accessibility which in his view differs from awareness. For instance, a linguistic structure or form is accessible if it can rapidly be identified. More explicitly, as Read (1978) expresses it, a linguistic form is accessible if it can be brought to awareness even if the learner has never been made aware of it previously and even if only practice can make him aware of it (p.71).

Additionally, Odlin accords metalinguistic knowledge a universal role in FL acquisition, that it contributes the most to communicative competence (p.132). He postulates that if this claim is true, then it is likely to attest four ensuing corollaries.

First, metalinguistic knowledge is attested as a natural phenomenon in child developmental language in all cultures. This attestation is supported by

Clark's (1978) previously mentioned finding, namely, that children reflect metalinguistic knowledge in their interactions.

Second, certain types of metalinguistic knowledge seem to be shared by all age groups, child and adults alike. This corollary is rooted in anthropological linguistics where several studies of primitive and developed communities indicate that they make extensive use of metalinguistic information in their interaction (op.cit:134). For instance, Heeschen (1978) reports that the Eipo people use metalinguistic terms abundantly in the course of their conversations.

The third corollary entails that salient metalinguistic knowledge of form and function will be highly accessible. Odlin cites a number of relevant studies (e.g. Shaughnessy, 1977; Bernando, 1980; Book and Irwin, 1980; Dietrich, 1982; Givon, 1983) showing that certain linguistic categories are more accessible than others. For instance, he states that metalinguistic knowledge is more accessible to sentences than clauses.

The fourth corollary noted by Odlin relates to the acquisition of both L1 and L2. He observes that metalanguage is still universally operational in the teaching and learning of the world written languages (e.g. English, German, French, Chinese, and Arabic), utilizing such terms as the grammatical parts of speech, clauses, word order, verb, subject, object, complement, and so forth.

On a different plane, research has provided a plethora of contrastive theoretical constructs used to handle the metalinguistic debate [3]. In a review of the various polarities used in experimental psychology, McLaughlin (1990) describes such contrasts as unproductive, ambiguous, and abundant with negative implications; hence, he calls for their abandonment and the adoption of an alternative polarity which he claims to be (a) empirically based, (b) dissociated from the conscious-unconscious polarity but (c) related to it only in so far as the target skills are routinized and established in long-term memory (p.621). McLaughlin's substitute polarity revolves round the notion of controlled-versus automatic- processing. He argues that in contrast with automatic processing, controlled processing demands learner active attention and serves to regulate the flow of information between short- and long term memory systems. Therefore, the latter should precede the former, at least in the initial stages of FL instruction (p.620). Following Schmidt (1990), McLaughlin demonstrates that the conscious- unconscious contrasts (see note 3 below) may generate multi-level meanings[4] (p.136) as well as variable cognitive and psychological implications and ensuing implementations. Thus, to him, those contrastive dichotomies cannot have

any empirical value unless they are internally examined to display what actually happens in each contrastive process.

However, while McLaughlin suggests the abandonment of those various linguistic processing contrasts and the adoption of this controlled-automatic learning model, Schmidt (1990) makes a compromise. He maintains that both types of process are relevant to FL learning though they play variable roles with respect to the cognitive and psychological operations involved in their actual implementation.

More recently, Schwartz (1993) has noted that"all linguistic behaviour is the overt manifestation of some type of underlying knowledge that is represented in the mind/ brain of an individual" (p. 147). Yet, she draws a distinction between "learned linguistic behaviour" which reflects interlanguage competence and "learned linguistic knowledge", i.e., metalinguistic knowledge which does not reflect interlanguage competence. In simpler terms, not all of the learner's linguistic knowledge represents his interlanguage competence. Drawing on evidence from a host of recent studies (e.g. Pierce, 1989; Redford, 1990; Goodluck and Roeper, 1992; Clahsen, 1991), Shwartz (p.151) highlights three aspects of the metalinguistic debate: (a) universal grammar, (b) learning strategies, and (c) contextualized input. The third aspect (c) entails the use of (1) metalinguistic data which consists of descriptive information about the FL, (2) positive data, and (3) negative data that comprise descriptive information about the impossibility of a certain FL form or utterance (eg.,*-ing* cannot be linked to *has* or *may*). She contends that negative data can support the role of positive data in activating the universal grammar aspect. However, while she contends that neither positive data nor negative data can affect the learner's interlanguage competence, she concedes that they may influence his linguistic behaviour, and sometimes that "may be all we are seeking" (p.160). Nonetheless, she shares several other researchers (e.g. Odlin, 1986; Rutherford, 1987) the contention that the first aspect of the metalinguistic debate, namely, universal grammar (metalinguistic knowledge) plays a positive role in the enhancement of FL competence.

In support of the positive role of metalinguistic knowledge in FL instruction, Sharwood-Smith (1993:170) maintains that learners do not take in the rule ... . They rather internalize examples of the rule that they use to 'crack the code' so they create or re-create rule systems on that basis. Thus, FL instruction tends to universally direct the learners' attention to a particular grammatical point through manipulating various techniques, such as explicit discussion and metalinguistic description, an approach designated by Sharwood- Smith as 'consciousness- raising' which deliberately focuses on

the formal properties of the target forms. As can be noted, this approach avoids elaborate metalinguistic terminology unless the learners are mature enough and well-trained in the use of the appropriate terms and concepts, both receptively and productively. Thus, consciousness- raising can simply be attained by means of analyzing sentences and morphological sequences as well as by focusing on lexical synonyms and antonyms. It is essential to note here that Sharwood-Smith calls for the use of metalinguistic awareness in FL instruction as an optional, final step over and above the intuitive acquisition of the target rule (p.172).

In recapitulation, the previous review does not imply that FL instruction should use metalanguage lavishly and without limits. It is likely that both explicit and implicit knowledge merge in processes of monitoring and organizing FL discourse. Thus, the role of explicit instruction in promoting FL proficiency cannot be blindly transcended.

The present study is a modest attempt in this direction. It aims primarily at examining the relationship between two types of metalinguistic knowledge namely, rule description and examples and the learners' linguistic and communicative competence in them, with an ultimate goal of establishing their potential role in FL instruction. To the present writer's best knowledge, the topic of the present study has not been examined before, at least with regard to Arab learners of English.

Purpose of the Study:

The present study is an endeavour to empirically investigate :

a. the potential role of gender in 10th Grade learners' metalinguistic competence, and
b. Tenth Grade learners'(5) knowledge of fifteen identified English grammatical concepts or categories by way of simple rule description and exemplification,
c. the disparity between learners' knowledge of these two metalinguistic modes,
d. the link between learners' metalinguistic knowledge of the target categories and their productive competence in using them both formally and communicatively in controlled contexts,
e. the order of accessibility to acquisition of the target categories by Jordanian 10th grade learners.

In simpler terms, the study is an attempt to explore the relationship between the 10th graders' metalinguistic knowledge of a grammatical category or an exponent of it and their global proficiency to apply this

knowledge to a contextualized utterance and a communicative setting as well as the accessibility of that category by the learners. Thus, the following hypotheses were to be tested:

1. The accessibility of both EMK and DMK is equal to both male and female learners.
2. Students' exemplary metalinguistic knowledge (EMK) is more substantive than their descriptive metalinguistic knowledge (DMK) of the target categories.
3. EMK is more facilitative of linguistic and communicative competence than DMK.
4. The accessibility orders of EMK and DMK correlate systematically positively with the formal-functional use of the categories.

Population, Sample, and Procedures:

The population of this study comprises all the 10th grade students in the Jordanian public schools. The sample consisted of 827 male and female 10th graders chosen randomly from several public schools in North Jordan.

To investigate the subjects' metalinguistic knowledge and the link of DMK and EMK with formal functional competence, 827 10th graders were tested in three batches at three intervals (in 1994, 1995 and 1996) on fifteen grammatical concepts or categories (see appendix) which were identified for their salience, being repeatedly presented-both explicitly and implicitly- in their EFL course. The salience of the 15 categories was judged by a good number of esxperts-four school supervisors, three university professors and six school teachers. These categories were then exposed in two corresponding tasks, one demanding DMK and the other EMK of the same categories. Both tasks were first given simultaneously to 280 students in 1994, and separately to 314 students in 1995 (155 students took task1, and 159 took task 2). The findings indicated a significant discrepancy between the students' EMK and DMK, but no differences due to the gender variable. The third time, four tasks including the first two, were administered simultaneously to 233 students in 1996. All three batches of students were chosen randomly from different public village and town schools in the northern areas of Jordan. They were meant to represent the 10th graders in public schools in the country on the basis that they belong to the same age-group and share similar socio-economic backgrounds and learning experiences.

Test and Statistical Treatment:

Thus the instrument of the study consisted of four parallel tasks, all involving the 15 target grammatical categories (see appendix).

Tasks 1 and 2 contain multiple-choice items: for task 1 students were required to identify a suitable, simple definition or description of the target category, and for task 2 they were asked to identify an example of that category. Task 3 demands the completion of 15 formally contextualized utterances with a suitable exponent of the target category while task 4 demands an appropriate functional use of the category in a well-defined situation. Each correct response on the four tasks was given (0-1) point. However, for task 4, a reasonably communicative response was given (0.5) point regardless of its grammatical, morphological, or orthographical accuracy.

The items of the four tasks were validated for content consistency by an expert jury. Besides, an early pilot administration of the test to 30 students at two different intervals indicated a high level of item stability on each task. In addition, the application of cronbach reliability co-efficients to the final form of the instrument showed a high level of internal consistency across the four tasks (0.92, 0.94, 0.88, and 0.78, respectively). The statistics needed for the verification of the hypotheses of the study were meanscores, standard deviations, t-tests for equality of means, Pearson correlation co-efficients, and Spearman rank correlation co-efficients.

Results and Discussion:

The first two tasks of the test (see 5 above) were first administered simultaneously to 280 male and female 10th graders, chosen at random from a number of schools in several areas in Jordan in 1994. The intention was to explore any differential potentiality between their DMK and EMK of the 15 target grammatical categories, t-test revealed a significant difference at $p<0.05$ between the subjects' mean scores on these two tasks in favour of EMK ($x=5.89$ and 6.8 respectively; t-value= -3.40). In the following year (1995) the same test was replicated on a larger sample of respondents but the two tasks were assigned separately to two groups of 10th graders: Task 1, the DMK, was given to 159 (116 male and 43 female) students and task 2, the EMK, to 155 (62 male and 93 female) students who were randomly selected from seven directorates of education in the northern areas of the country. This second trial was intended to validate the first trial's finding by having different but same level students take each task alone. Besides, it

purported to investigate the potential role of gender in the acquisition of metalinguistic knowledge. The results are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Variable Means and Standard Deviations on Tasks 1 and 2. (N:314)

Variable	Task 1			Task 2		
	No	X	s.d	No.	X	s.d
Male	116	7.05	2.43	62	8.29	2.32
Female	43	6.95	1.75	93	8.12	2.01
All	159	7.03	2.25	155	8.19	2.13

The data in table 1 indicate that males and females scored roughly equally on both tasks. T-test revealed no significant difference at $p.<0.05$ between their mean scores on each task (t-value=-0.39 and 0.17 respectively). This finding attests the homogeneity of the sample groups on the one hand, and the neutrality of the gender variable with respect to descriptive and exemplary metalinguistic acquisition, on the other. Thus, our first hypothesis above was ratified and for this matter the sex variable was precluded from the ensuing replications of the test..

On the other hand, a cursory look at table 1 would demonstrate that Jordanian 10th grader's mean scores were below average (maximum score for each task is 15) on task 1 and a little bit above average on task 2. Nevertheless, these results suggest a relatively substantive level of DMK and EMK by the subjects. It is plausible that this substantial metalinguistic knowledge is a corollary of the instruction type they have received at school. Since almost all of the students' FL input comes primarily from classroom instruction (teacher and teaching materials), it may well be the case that Jordanian BES teachers emphasize metalinguistic description and exemplification in their instructional practices. This extrapolation is attested by the researcher's personal observation that in reality BES English language teachers embark quite intensively on giving exemplars and explanation of the target learning rule. Yet, there is no empirical evidence that this metalanguage is the product of formal instruction alone: a host of variables including, the quantity of metalinguistic intake, the psychological and socio-economic atmosphere of learning and other receptive and implicit processes may have played a central role in this regard.

Moreover, as Table 1 shows, the difference in the groups' meanscores on the two metalinguistic tasks ($x=8.19$ vs 7.03) endorses the trend which had been found in the first trial test of 1994. T-test for equality of means for the two tasks also indicate a statistically significant difference ($p.<0.05$) in favour of the EMK group which undertook to answer task 2 (t-value=4.70). The

implication is that Jordanian 10th graders are more successful at identifying the target grammatical concepts by way of exemplification than by descriptive explanation. This conclusion is in line with empirical research findings (e.g. Odlin, 1986; Sharwood- Smith, 1993) and confirms our second hypothesis in (3) above. If this finding holds true in the majority of cases, it will then suggest that exemplary instruction is more effective than rule description. It is granted that, unlike clear and straightforward exemplars, descriptive accounts or definitions are more demanding. Besides, they are complicated by the conventional teaching practices which often introduce inadequate, rather faulty input.

The findings of the previous prototypical tests, namely the neutrality of gender and the superiority of 10th graders on EMK have motivated the researcher to design two other corresponding tasks manipulating the same 15 grammatical categories in two contexts: linguistic or formal, and situational or communicative (see appendix). The formally contextualized task requires the use of structural forms embodying the 15 target categories or concepts involved in task1. This is the third task of the present test. The fourth task, the situationally contextualized task, consists of 15 communicative situations or scenarios entailing the use of an appropriate communicative utterance or exponent of the corresponding target grammatical category. In 1996, the four tasks were given collectively to a sample of 233 10th graders, chosen randomly from schools in seven directorates of education in North Jordan. All subjects attempted to complete the four tasks in one, somehow lengthy session.

The students' scores on the first two tasks were paired and compared. T-test for equality of means once more confirmed the same trend attested by the prototypical tests (see table 2) namely, that 10th graders' metalinguistic knowledge of the target categories is substantive, more substantive for the EMK group than the DMK group ($\bar{x}$=10.67 vs 8.73 respectively). This finding is in line with research findings. For instance, Odlin (1986) and Dulany, et al. (1984)-cited in McLaughlin, 1990) found that substantive metalinguistic knowledge is facilitated more by exemplification. More importantly, the papers were sorted out according to the higher grade the student obtained on either task. In simpler words, students who scored higher on task1 were sorted out together as the DMK group; those who scored higher on task2, the EMK group. The sorting process resulted in 103 papers for the first group and 130 for the second. Table 2 shows the students' mean scores, standard deviations, and t-values for the significance of mean differences on the first two tasks of the test only. The ultimate purpose of this sorting process was to pursue the link between the subjects'

metalinguistic knowledge of the target categories and their formal-functional proficiency in using those categories in formal and communicative contexts.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and t-values of Groups on Tasks 1 and 2

Group/task	Task 1			Task 2		
	No.	X	s.d	x	s.d	t-value*
1. Descriptive (DMK)	103	8.78	2.80	-	-	
2. Exemplary (EMK)	130	-	-	10.67	2.18	5.96
All	233	8.96	3.09	8.03	2.80	4.60

*significant at $P < 0.05$.

Stated more directly, it was hypothesized that, generally, students who have scored higher on the exemplary task will also score higher on the linguistic proficiency task and on the communicative, situational task (third hypothesis in 3 above). In other words, if the EMK group also proved more successful than the DMK group at using the target grammatical forms in the formal (structural) contexts and the situational, communicative contexts, then we would assume a more positive role for EMK and, subsequently, exemplary instruction in enhancing the learners' linguistic proficiency and communicative competence than DMK and rule explanation instruction. It is to this end that the following discussion is addressed. Table 3 presents the mean scores, standard deviations, and t-values for the differences between the accessibility of the four tasks to the groups.

Table 3 Means, Standard Deviations of Task Accessibility to Groups.

Group /Task	No.	Task 1		Task 2		Task 3		Task 4	
		x	s.d	x	s.d	x	s.d	x	s.d
1.Descriptive (DMK)	103	8.73	2.80	-	-	7.00	2.98	4.62	2.96
2.Exemplary (EMK)	130	-	-	10.67	2.65	8.10	2.73	5.54	3.14
t-value						2.84			2.27
2-tailed signif.*						2.84			0.024

* significant at $P < 0.05$.

As evident from table 3, the mean scores of the EMK group on all tasks are higher than those of the DMK group. T-tests show that the differences are statistically significant at the $p.<0.05$ level favouring the EMK group. It is also evident that task 3 is more accessible to both groups than task 4 as indicated by their mean scores. Since the groups' achievement on both tasks 3 and 4 was significantly variable in favour of the EMK group,

our third hypothesis is supported, namely that, by and large, the students who have demonstrated superior knowledge of exemplars of the 15 target categories have also done so in both the formal and communicative contexts, a finding suggesting that EMK is more facilitative of linguistic and communicative competence than DMK.

Moreover, Pearson Correlation co-efficients (see table 4 below) show relatively strong positive correlations between the groups' EMK and DMK of the target categories and their corresponding formal and functional use. In other words, the data show a positive correlation between metalangauge and language use: EMK correlating more strongly than DMK with the students' overall proficiency in using those categories in FL discrouse both in grammatical and communicative contexts. It is plausible thus that the more accessible the metalinguistic knowledge, the more facilitative it is of formal-functional implementation. In other words, students who excelled in EMK also excelled in formal and functional use.

Table 4. Correlation of Groups' Achievement on Tasks

Group/task	No.		T1	T2	T3	T4
1.Descriptive (DMK)	103	T1	1.000	-	0.4356*	0.4132*
2. Exemplary (EMK)	130	T2	-	1.000	0.6614*	0.4301*

- 2- tail signif. at α=0.01 and α=0.001

However, since this study is product-oriented, there is no empirical evidence to determine the implicit processes which have caused the subjects' proficiency, or triggered the effect of EMK or DMK on language acquisition in the given contexts. Positive correlations, significant as they may be, cannot establish a causal relationship between either metalinguistic mode and acquisition. Obviously, there are other variables which determine that relationship, such as the quality of input, the quality of intake of metalanguage, in addition to the global psychological and socio-economic atmosphere of learning.

On the whole, the positive correlations imply that students who have exhibited more metalinguistic knowledge of either type have also exhibited higher ability in using the target categories both formally and communicatively. In other words, both modes seem to be accessible for formal and functional proficiency though one type, the EMK, is more accessible for correct performance. Despite their variable accessibility, the positive correlations of both types of metalinguistic knowledge with formal

and communicative language use, as found in this study, usher into the direction of formal-functional indivisibility of acquisition (Odlin, 1986:31).

Linguistic and Metalinguistic Accessibility of Categories to Groups

To test the fourth hypothesis in (3) above, the accessibility of the 15 categories to the subjects on the four tasks was established. The correct responses to each category were tallied and compared on a hierarchical scale using Spearman rank correlation co-efficient. Table 5 indicates the obtained scores and rank of each category on the four tasks.

Table 5 Scores and Ranks of Categories on All Tasks.

Category*	DMK Group (N=103)						EMK Group (N=130)					
	T1		T3		T4		T2		T3		T4	
	r	s	r	s	r	s	r	s	r	s	r	s
1. Conditional type (2)	7	60	11	39	12	22	3	112	6	80	7	53
2. Adv. of manner	5	65	2	75	1	45	8	90	3	88	13	32
3. Adv.clause of time	3	80	1	76	2	43	6	100	4	86	5	57
4. Phrasal verb	9	55	13	36	6	37	11	83	14	51	8	51
5. Reported Question	4	72	7	48	8	32	15	57	11	58	10	47
6. Gerund	11	52	14	35	15	30	13	78	10	60	9	48
7. Present Perfect.	1	86	3	66	5	29	4	108	5	82	1	65
8. Relative cl. (pron)	8	57	5	51	14	28	12	80	9	67	14	31
9. Uncount noun	12	51	8	46	7	35	9	87	8	68	15	28
10. Simple comparative	2	83	6	50	4	40	5	105	7	74	3	59
11. Passive voice	14	38	12	37	9	30	7	96	13	54	12	33
12. Information Quest.	10	54	4	56	13	20	1	116	2	90	4	58
13. Possessive pron.	15	30	10	43	10	29	14	76	12	56	11	42
14. Simple pres. tense	6	63	9	45	3	41	10	85	15	48	6	56
15. Positive Quest. tag.	13	49	15	18	11	28	2	114	1	92	2	60

• see appendix: T=task; r=rank; s=score.

The order of the categories in terms of their total scores of correct responses along the three tasks performed by each group is obvious in table 5. However, the scrutiny of the data shows that the ranks lack systematic relationships: the same category displays a variable array of positions on the corresponding tasks. In addition the small differential range between the scores of several categories on the same task (1-4 points) shows that their ranks are not so distinctive, a fact that may blur the significance of their potentially differential accessibility. Generally, while the scores in table 5 exhibit a descending paradigm for the majority of categories on the three

tasks, their order of learning difficulty (or accessibility) is unpredictable, i.e. it can be higher, lower or the same.

Moreover, the data in Table 5 point out that the learners' DMK and EMK are more substantive than theit corresponding knowledge or skill to use them in tasks 3 and 4, with communicative achievement on Task 4 being nearly systematically less substantial than structural achievement on Task 3.

These irregularities cannot equip us to surmise a causal relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and acquisition of formal-functional competence. The data unequivocally imply that metalinguistic knowledge does not convert fairly equally to structural and communicative knowledge. The categories which have occupied higher ranks of accessibility on the proficiency scales (3 and 4) than the metalinguistic scales (1 and 2) suggest that some learners have acquired them without knowing their exemplars or description or, perhaps, as a result of other implicit knowledge processes. On the other hand, those categories which have obtained lower ranks of accessibility on the proficiency tasks than the metalinguistic tasks are suggestive of a potential effect, that it is likely that the formal and communicative proficiency of some learners in the target categories has been facilitated by their metalinguistic knowledge of those categories.

However the link between the accessibility ranks of the categories was tested by the Spearman rank correlation co-efficient. It was speculated that the correlation between the accessibility rank of each individual category on any two of the four tasks would be a better indicator of the relationship between metalanguage and language use than the correlation between the subjects' collective grades of all the fifteen categories on each task which was previously demonstrated in table 4. Table 6 shows these correlations.

Table 6. Correlation of Category Accessibility Ranks

Group/Task		T1	T2	T3	T4
DMK	T1	1.00	-	0.6678	0.5785
EMK	T2		1.000	0.725	0.6185

As evident from table 6, the correlation's between the accessibility ranks on any two tasks is substantially positive, with EMK producing a stronger effect on both of the proficiency tasks 3 and 4.

Even without statistical evidence, a thorough investigation of the data in Table 5 would portray a positive tendency for rank conformity; hence a positive effect of metalanguage on the learning accessibility of formal and functional language use. The first thing to be noticed is that a good

proportion of categories have occupied very close positions on the three tasks, though some have made great strides. More importantly, we also notice that a good number of the high rank categories on the metalinguistic scales have also come top scale on the other two tasks. Thus, as can be seen in Table 5, while top categories on Task 1 (e.g., 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, and 14) have also occupied top positions on Task 3 and Task 4 respectively, the lower categories on the same task (e.g. 4, 6,9 , 11, 13, and 15) have also come at the bottom of Task 3 and Task 4, respectively. The same tempo holds for the EMK group where the top categories on task 2 (e.g. 1, 3, 7, 10, 12 and 15) have also come top on Task 3 and Task 4, respectively. Likewise, the bottom scale categories on task 2 have also occupied low positions on tasks 3 and 4. Some categories, moreover, maintained very close positions on the three tasks. Thus, we see that the more substantive the DMK or EMK of the learners is, the more substantive their grammatical and communicative proficiency is, a tendency ushering into a facilitative role of metalinguistic knowledge in general. However, while the attested correlations and trends cannot be taken as intrinsic determinants of acquisition, they may lend support to our claim of the availability of a positive relationship, namely, that metalinguistic knowledge facilitates proficiency but does not trigger it. Thus, generally, the findings of this study establish a facilitative role for simple and clear DMK and EMK in language use and, perhaps, this is all that is desired in classroom learning situations.

Acquisition of the 15 Categories.

It may not be so accurate to attempt to determine the sequence of acquisition of the 15 target categories by Jordanian 10th graders on the basis of their achievement on the test used in the present study. Nonetheless, the total score of the correct responses of all subjects (233) on each category may partly be taken as a measure of learning difficulty or accessibility and, ultimately, of acquisition. Table 7 shows the total scores and order of the 15 categories in the given grammatical and situational contexts. The ability to use the target categories in the given contexts is examined here independently of the subjects' metalinguistic knowledge of them.

The first relevant remark here is that the differences between the scores which signal the order of many of the target categories are so scanty that their positions are practically indistinctive. Hence, they can be conceived of as having the same level of accessibility and consequently, equally acquired by the subjects. Besides, it is obvious from the data in table 7 that the subjects' formal proficiency is far more substantial than their functional proficiency in using the same target categories in communicative situations despite the fact that half of the categories have obtained higher ranks of

accessibility on the communicative task vis a vis the formal or grammatical task. Only one category has occupied equal positions on both scales.

Table 7. Order of Formal and Functional Accessibility of Categories.

	Category*	Formal use		Commun. use	
		Score	rank	score	rank
1.	Conditional type (2)	119	6	75	11
2.	Adv. of manner	163	1	77	9
3.	Adv clause of time	162	2	120	1
4.	Phrasal verb	87	15	88	6
5.	Reported Question	106	10	79	7
6.	Gerund	95	12	78	8
7.	Present Perfect	148	3	94	4
8.	Relative cl. (pron)	118	7	59	15
9.	Uncount noun	114	8	65	13
10.	Simple comparative	124	5	99	2
11.	Passive voice	91	14	63	14
12.	Information Quest.	146	4	76	10
13.	Possessive pron.	99	11	71	12
14.	Simple pres. tense	93	13	97	3
15.	Positive Quest. tag	110	9	89	5
	Average	118.33		82	

Moreover, the data in table 7 indicate that category 2, *adverb* of *manner*, has come top of the formal proficiency scale while category 4, *phrasal verb*, at its bottom, thus implying their learning diffiulty level, that the former is the easiest and the latter the most difficult category to learn. Next on the same scale came the other categories in the order displayed in the table. By contrast, category 3, *the adverb clause of time*, was the most accessible for communicative use whereas category 8, the *relative clause*, was the least accessible. Next in accessibility came the other categories subsequently in the displayed manner on this scale. The data also show incongruous match between category orders of accessibility. The rank correlation between the two types of language use is very weak (0.20), implying that formal proficiency does not lead straightforwardly to communicative use in the FL.

The subjects' variable performance of these categories reverberates the quantitative and qualitative variability of exposure to them in formal,

manipulative and situational communicative classroom instruction. The categories which have ranked low on the scales are those which have been introduced late in the course, or the least emphasized both in the instructional materials and the teachers' practices. The difficulty of learning may also be due to the complexity of the category itself. Thus, the top category on the formal scale, namely, *the adverb of manner* ,has been easy for the subjects to acquire formally as it generally requires only the ***ly***-suffix, but difficult to use communicatively, whereas the next to lowest category, *the passive voice*, has been difficult for them both formally and communicatively due to its structural complexity despite its relatively early introduction in the course. Obviously, the subjects' achievement in the communicative use of most of the target categories is lower than in the corresponding formal proficiency. This disparity can be accounted for in terms of the quality of classroom instruction. It is true that teachers overwhelmingly emphasize formal descriptive ad exemplary accounts of linguistic input and neglect practice through communicative activities. Consequently, though frequently encountered in the course, the low-rank categories on the communicative scale imply that they have been infrequently practiced in communicative situations.

In sum, table 7 indicates a weak level of the subjects' acquisition of the majority of the target categories both in formal and in communicative linguistic use, with less substantive acquisition in the latter than the former contexts. However, a warning seems to be in order here. Although the hierarchy displayed may be taken as indicative of the accessibility order of the target categories for Jordanian students at the terminal stage of basic education, the results demand more empirical verification: The scores obtained for the categories in both contexts are very close and may, thus, blur the significance of the distinction between the attested hierarchies.

Summary.

In recapitulation, our teaching experience informs us that FL teachers use metalinguistic instruction remarkably extensively. Some scholars assume a facilitative role for explicit knowledge while others deny this role or minimize its relevance. Explicit knowledge or metalanguage need not match that of a linguist's formulations. Suffice it to be simple and comprehensible by the learner. But the teacher ought to guard against oversimplicity which may lead to inaccuracy.

The aim of this study has been to assess Jordanian 10th graders' metlinguistic knowledge of 15 salient English grammatical categories via rule description and exemplification. In addition, the study has purported to probe

the relationship between the learners' metalinguistic knowledge of the categories and their ability to utilize this knowledge in formally-and functionally-oriented contexts. To conduct this investigation, the acquisition of the fifteen grammatical categories has been explored on four tasks, two of which test the learners' metalinguistic knowledge via two modes: simple rule description and simple exemplification whereas the other two tasks test the learners' ability to use the same categories in formally context- bound utterances and in communicative situations. It was found that the subjects' metalinguistic knowledge of the target categories was substantial, but learners were more successful at identifying the categories through examples than descriptive accounts. To verify this finding, 233 10th grade students from public schools, chosen randomly from the different directorates of education in North Jordan, were tested on the four tasks. Their papers were then sorted out into two groups based on their higher total scores on tasks 3 and 4. The scores of each group were compared along the three respective tasks they undertook to perform. Since the prototype tests, which comprise the first two tasks, revealed significant differences between the subjects' awareness of the two modes of metalinguistic knowledge in favour of EMK but no significant differences due to gender, the latter variable was precluded.

Conclusions:

It was found that the exemplary group was significantly more successful at using the categories both in formal and communicative contexts than the descriptive group. Both groups, moreover, were more successful at formal use than communicative use. The analysis has also revealed traces of significant positive correlations between both modes of metalinguistic knowledge of the target grammatical categories and their formal and communicative use, with EMK being more positive than DMK in both types of context. However, this correlation cannot establish a causal relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and language acquisition. Acquisition cannot be explored merely by the investigation instrument of the present study. Nevertheless, while metalinguistic knowledge is unlikely to trigger acquisition, its positive correlation with both structural and communicative use suggests a potentially facilitative role of it in the enhancement of performance, with EMK being more facilitative than DMK in FL leaning.

Furthermore, the study has revealed that not all FL categories are equally accessible to Jordanian learners, both metalinguistically and instrumentally in language use. Besides, the highest level of acquisition of

either type of metalinguistic knowledge of a particular category is not straightforwardly matched with the highest formal or communicative use of that category: learners show considerable variation in their acquistional behaviour. More explicitly, the relationship between the learners' metalinguistic knowledge of a certain grammatical category and its linguistic use is inconsistent and irregular. However, a good number of categories have exhibited a positive tendency towards consistency, that is, some categories which obtained high scores on the metalinguistic tasks also tended to have high scores, though variably, on the formal and functional tasks and, conversely, some of the categories which scored low on the metalinguistic tasks also tended to score low on the formal and situation tasks. By and large, these findings indicate a positive and facilitative role for metalinguistic knowledge in FL learning in formally and communicatively-oriented situations.

Finally, the study has demonstrated a hierarchy of category accessibility for use in formal and functional contexts, influenced by the quality of instruction, the complexity of structure, and frequency of exposure to the learning materials. The disparity in the levels of a acquisition of the different categories in both contexts is undoubtedly an evidence that formal use does not necessarily change into functional use if the former is not practiced in situational and communicative activities.

Recommendations

Ensuing from the conclusions of this study, the researcher would recommend formal FL instruction in Jordanian schools. However, FL instruction in Jordanian schools should not remain restrictively formal. It should also involve communicative practice and ample simulative work in which the learners are constantly encouraged to communicate meaningfully, using all the linguistic assets they have acquired throughout their FL learning experience. Teachers should first of all emphasize the communicative use of the FL in their instruction. Explicit, formal instruction ought to follow implicit instruction, preferably through 'consciousness-raising' in clear and meaningful contexts. In the formal instruction stage, simple descriptive accounts are recommended, conditional that they are complete, accurate, and meaningfully presented. However, EFL teachers must guard against oversimplicity which is conducive to fostering inaccuracy and inappropriateness and, ultimately, linguistic fossilization. Additionally, it is recommended that instructional input should maximize the use of examples in clear situations as these are found to be more facilitative than rule descriptions. Finally, the researcher feels that while the findings and conclusions derived from this study are tenable, a verifying replication on a

larger and different-level sample of learners and different grammatical categories seems to be imperative to justify the use of formal instruction in FL classes.

Briefly, formal input must be flexibly presented to learners in contextutalized and communicative activities prior to simplified descriptions and representative exemplars which may, though, meet the learners' needs. Besides, while avoiding abstract and theoretical terminology is necessary,

Notes:

1. The researcher draws on his personal experience as instructor, teacher trainer and supervisor of English for a long time at the Ministry of Education and at Yarmouk University.
2. Odlin (1986, p.126) reports Bialystock's (1984) claim that this function of metalinguistic knowledge is to store information which may be useful for monitoring and which is not part of implicit knowledge (e.g., the distinction in the prescriptive usage between *raise* and *rise*).
3. As McLaughlin (1990) points out, experimental psychology research flows with binary contrasts that tackle the role of formal knowledge in FL acquisition, such as conscious- unconscious, learning- acquisition, intentional incidental, explicit- implicit, focal peripheral, short term long term memory, etc.. McLaughlin believes that these polarities are dubious, lack specificity, and are laden with various negative meanings. For further illustration of these negative implications see Schmidt (1990).

McLaughlin (1990, p. 628) sums up Schmidt's (1990) detailed meaning levels of the conscious- unconscious contrasts as follows:

Conscious	Unconscious
- Learning with awareness	- Learning without awareness
- noticing	- not noticing
- understanding and insight	- no understanding or insight
- intention to learn	- incidental learning
- intention to use metalinguistic strategies	- no such intention
- ability to repeat what is known	- no such ability
- explicit knowledge	- implicit knowledge
- focal attention	- peripheral attention
- short- term memory	- long term memory
- controlled processing	- automatic processing
- serial processing	- parallel processing

5. 10th graders in Jordanaian schools have had six years of English instruction. They terminate the Basic Stage of Education in the country.

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ورد البحث للمجلة في ١٩٩٦/٦/١٦ وأعيد بعد تعديله في ١٩٩٦/١٠/٢٢ وأجيز للنشر في ١٩٩٧/٢/١